

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: August 10, 2017

Agenda Item: Dome Mountain Wildlife Management Area Addition

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Min

Background

FWP proposes to acquire approximately 5,366 acres of land adjacent to the Dome Mountain Wildlife Management Area (DMWMA), resulting in an expansion of the DMWMA from 4,712 acres to 10,078 acres. Conserving this parcel is critical to maintaining wildlife resources in the area, and to minimizing wildlife conflicts with neighboring agriculture. The proposed addition provides critical winter range for the northern Yellowstone elk herd, and supports a rich diversity of ungulate, carnivore and nongame species, including grizzly bears, wolves, lions, bighorn sheep, mule deer, antelope, white-tailed deer, and upland birds. The wintering elk population in this area is a highly valued public resource, however there are ongoing conflicts with neighboring agricultural operations due to game damage and brucellosis risk. The current owner has managed the property for wildlife, and wildlife have benefited from the landowner's high tolerance and habitat conservation. If the proposed acquisition does not occur, there is a real threat of habitat loss due to development and/or loss of tolerance for elk and other wildlife on the property, depending on the values of the new property owner. Any loss of habitat or tolerance would result in FWP having to manage for lower elk numbers, and likely increased grizzly conflicts, as well as impacts to other wildlife species that depend upon this property for seasonal range or movement corridors. This could also impact DMWMA, as wildlife movement to and from the WMA could be affected by habitat loss on this adjacent property. The owner of the proposed addition is only interested in selling the property outright. Acquisition would provide abundant hunting and recreational opportunities in an area of rich wildlife resources that has been closed to public access for decades. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation has agreed to partner with FWP on this project and has taken the lead on fundraising, negotiating, and outreach for support to acquire this property.

Public Involvement Process & Results

Upon Commission endorsement, FWP would continue to work on this project, including conducting public scoping and developing a draft environmental assessment and management plan for public review and comment.

Alternatives and Analysis

No action would leave the property unprotected from the possibility of future development and habitat loss, and loss of tolerance for elk, grizzlies and other wildlife. Acquisition of the property would secure a block of habitat that is contiguous with the WMA, providing critical elk winter range, high value foothill habitat for many priority wildlife species, and an important elk migration corridor to Yellowstone National Park.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the commission endorse this proposal because of the high habitat values adjacent to an existing WMA and for establishing abundant new hunting and recreational opportunities.

Proposed Motion I move the Fish and Wildlife commission endorse this addition to Dome Mountain Wildlife Management Area, allowing FWP to proceed with further negotiations, evaluation, due diligence, and public review.